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Creative Economy Report 2013 Special Edition: widening local development pathways

Jonathan Vickery

"Creative Economy Report 2013 Special Edition: widening local development pathways by UNESCO and UNDP"

available online at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/creative-economy-report-2013-special-edition/>

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The Creative Economy Report 2013 Special Edition: widening local development pathways is both rigorous and colourful in equal measure, and stands as a powerful contribution to growing policy debates on the role of “culture and creative industries” in International Development. The implications of the report are broader than its title may indicate. “Development” is now a significant critical discourse, generating a range of responses to the perverse impact of the global economics of “growth” and its symbiosis of wealth and poverty, relation between economic and social policy, education, social wellbeing and rights, and the question of sustainability. And furthermore, in an age when sustainability has become a global imperative, development itself (as in the ideologically-coopted phrase “sustainable development”) is the most vital framework for all policy fields globally, not just for “developing” countries. The focus of the report is indeed “developing countries”, but with some irony. Here we find innovations in the arts and culture for democracy and human rights – as well as social and economic development – from which “the West” could learn.

The conceptual clarity of the Report is exemplary: the first chapter is to be recommended to any newcomer to creative economy for International Development. Chapter 2 argues for an effective “local” turn in development policy; Chapter 3 emphasizes the non-monetary values of culture as an object of development and Chapter 4, heavily laden with case studies, presents the diverse manifestations of creative economy throughout the world’s regions, where its

“pluralistic view understands the contours of the creative economy as contingent and path dependent” (p. 18). From the fifth chapter there follows a discussion on policies and strategy development (regulatory frameworks, financial instruments, trade and export facilitators, institutional infrastructures, and so on), determining the factors that impact and impede local-level development. Chapters 6–8 (the conclusion) look at practical steps from policy research to qualitative and quantitative indicators, strategic planning within broad UN frameworks, available data gathering by various bodies, and short overviews of the work of agencies like International Fund for Cultural Diversity.

The Report is available in hard copy, but most will download it for free in PDF form. The “special edition” suffix indicates that the text is appended to a web documentary of case material, but is also a supplement to two preceding Creative Economy reports (of 2008 and 2010; the latter being an expanded version of the former) (UNCTAD [2008](#), [2010](#)). The significance of the first reports must be underlined: pioneered by Edna dos Santos-Duisenberg, with huge contributions throughout by Andy Pratt and David Throsby, the reports succeeded in constructing a solid basis for the policy representation of creative economy in an international context (no small feat given the kinds of lobby groups that dominate international development). The project was initially supported within the UNCTAD’s Creative Economy and Industries Programme, allied with the UN Office for South-South Co-operation, whose commitment remains; an online database for global creative industries is still available. Given the competitive nature of UN multi-agency cooperation, the report cites the recent push in the UN for a “One UN” front, at least on high profile policy publications. Whatever the compromises of this, like any multi-agency policy statement (noticeable is the influence of WIPO and so WTO), the intellectual leadership of Yudhishtir

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Raj Isar (along with Danielle Cliche and Francisco Simplicio), with their drafting committee, ensured that this unusual publication speaks with one voice and with a strong and convincing polemical thrust. Its distinctive critical dimension, setting it apart from its predecessors, echoes the work and input of Chris Gibson, Allen J. Scott and Justin O’Connor.

The Report is unusual insofar as it does not adhere to the ideological lines between policy and strategy, culture and economy, and introduces a form of agency into development delivery that exceeds the previous models of patronage and what we have come to expect of UN-led development projects (De Beukelaer, [2014](#)). It emphasizes the local and entrepreneurial, and to some extent improvisation; it argues for the contiguity of informal with formal economies, and insists on how “creative and cultural activities emerge organically from communities and places

and cannot be easily ‘invented’ into industries” (p. 26). The creative economy “raises key issues of both cultural policy and cultural politics. What is being made and consumed? By whom and for whom? What kind of culture is being produced today and for what kind of citizenry?” (p. 30). One sub-text animating the report is an ethical one: as the first Creative Economy Report 2008 had shown, the huge continent of Africa, with its extraordinary levels of cultural production, is active in less than 1 per cent of world exports in creative goods.

The Report attempts, quite successfully, to include a range of voices “from the field” (through case material), and with it something of a critical revision of the previous two reports’ priority on capacity building for international trade. The previous reports were not without their critical dimension, and were in part motivated by a measure of frustration at how developing countries found it almost impossible to construct independent creative industries and compete in international markets. Nonetheless, the foci of commitment were the strategy models, organization, and marketing demanded by the global neoliberal order. The emphasis of this new Report, however, is the empowerment of specific forms of cultural agency in specific local contexts: in other words, the problem of self-determination (if equally, a realpolitik approach to western market hegemony). In terms of content, the report’s analysis is well-framed and problem-driven, without the previous reports’ survey data on production, employment, value and revenues, IP regulation, and more importantly perhaps, no explicit compliance with the US-oriented new economic growth theories through which creative cities and creative class have become popular policy concepts in the global South. While the last chapter frames the preceding content in the major development frameworks (such as the UN’s Millennium Development Goals: 2000–2015), its content remains a substantial resource for local urban, cultural and community development, as well as for the growing post-2015 lobby for the role of cultural policy in international development (see the work of Agenda 21 for Culture) (UCLG, 2004).

The Report’s impressive range of strategic ideas and examples are in part generated by “viewing the creative economy in humanistic terms, i.e., creativity as an embodied, lived quality informing a diverse range of industries and activities” (p. 154), but also by asserting that in development contexts art and commerce, human and capital, finance and community, need not be mutually hostile or a hostage to the fortunes of the global markets. To this extent, it advances a dialogue between humanities and social science on cultural research. For: “The value of culture in and for human development transcends economic analysis in particularly meaningful ways” (p. 39). While obviously tempered in its politics, the report’s thrust is to reinvest local cultural agency with the identity and empowerment so long advocated by UNDP’s Human Development (and Human Rights) fraternity (UNDP, 2004). By implication, this new critical development framework can offer the “creative industries” a means of forging new models of

economy: for “what we refer to as the ‘economy’ is bound up with processes of social and cultural relations. In this sense, it reminds us that the economy itself is a part of culture” (p. 24). The report’s third chapter defines dimensions of the cultural economy outside the standard structures of production, distribution, and consumption – where cultural expression

(individually or collectively produced arts and culture), tangible and intangible cultural heritage, urban planning and architecture, play a significant role. And it reminds us how non-Western cultures possess levels of creativity that exceed the ego-centric individualism of their Western counterparts.

As a means of fleshing out its substantial conceptual content, the Report contains almost 40 short case illustrations or statements (from the commercially successful Nollywood, to community arts in Memphis, USA; the Book Café in Harare; the Essaouira Festival, Morocco; The Carwan Gallery, Beirut; The Bob Marley Museum in Kingston Jamaica; The Reemdoogo Music Garden, Ouagadougou; and Rotterdam’s city-supported Creative Factory project, among others). Yudhishtir Raj Isar, as chief editor, has evidently taken care to flag up the significance of narrative and qualitative indicators of development, and equally careful to avoid promoting western exemplars of creative industry production or indeed to prioritize any one level of development or region; having said that, the report does take its examples “mainly from low- and middle-income countries located in the global South” (p. 154).

The content of the Report all converges quite effectively on the principal theme, which is of course, “local” cultural development through a strategic devolution of development policy and management. This is determined by a “path dependency” methodology, which can appear somewhat paradoxical, not least as the significance ascribed to the “pathway” concept, consistently repeated, is not grounded on any real theorization (i.e. with regard the path dependency tradition in social sciences or economics and how this reconfigures our conception of cultural policies). In one sense it does this by implication, yet the rigorous strategy and management guidelines from Chapter 6 onwards raise a question on how these procedures or “tools” remain neutral with regard the actual historical-material conditions of local practice (to be uncovered in situ by the “path dependency” approach in the field). In other words, where the path dependency approach is a welcome corrective to the hegemony of Western strategic management and its planning methodologies, there is a sense that the real material conditions of production will still be determined by the regulative demands of the development funding regime and its sponsor.

The virtues of the “path dependency” methodology seem to remain on the priority of production and producers, and where we could assume developing countries

are “lacking in key institutional and/or regulatory conditions” (p. 32), a pathway approach could localize production in a way that avoids the large-scale (and usually corrupt or authoritarian) state apparatus or the large-scale development project-approach itself. At the same time, we must be careful with the assumption that “local” entails non-alienated labour – one of the genuine triumphs of industrial modernity was surely the liberation from the local and its material confines, along with the fiefdoms and tribal allegiances to which it is invariably subject. Economic abstraction seemed to be the price of social equality. The Report tries to hedge its bets in this respect: there is no specific “strategic” advice on how to manage local hegemonies within “local” creative economies, or indeed given how “culture” within local contexts is more likely to be (already) embedded in existing traditions, patriarchal control of the means of production or distribution, and particular or local policy regimes. For as the second chapter acknowledges, “it is difficult to make hard and fast distinctions between the local and the national. Successful policies will generally emerge from synergies between these two levels of government” (p. 35). For “the complexity of cultural infrastructures around the world means that the best policy responses are not always obvious or straightforward” (p. 28). The report is careful (obviously) not to refer critically to any field of UN or development agency practice and so the contexts of application or implementation of the local path dependency methodology remains open-ended; the case studies are more short illustrations than case explanations on how path dependency has been applied as strategy. Altogether, while the Report indeed inspires a general indication of how creative economy could provide a means of local cultural activism in redefining the socio-cultural political complex of the local in any given place, the

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meaning of the local for cultural policy remains so diffuse one can only assume that, like creative economy, it is not a “place” so much as a policy construct.

Of perhaps greater significance are the general principles that emerge on the relation between culture and economy, and how creative economy/creative industries should be part of a broader cultural policy. While the Report (like the previous two) tends to import Western categories, such as industrial sectors, into developing contexts, it also demands that development agencies appreciate the endlessly variable relation between the actual economy and the creative economy, and the specificity of each dimension of cultural production. With an ethical force, the Report asserts how the creative economy is inseparable from culture, and culture inseparable from the flows and fissures of social and communal life (however this may be defined). For the spectrum of cultural activities, it seems,

can only be partially comprehended and framed by cultural policy, and while culture can benefit from being subject to economic “sector”-like identity and investment, it does not respond to policy intervention in a way other sectors do (see Pratt, 2012). Furthermore, some statements in the Report indicate a certain internecine battle within cultural policy for International Development. What the report calls “the dark, destructive side of heritage in development initiatives” (p. 45), for example, indicates how cultural policy is always in danger of instrumentalism if not ideological colonization, and therefore as much attention to decision-making should be afforded as awarded to research, strategy and management.

To conclude, the paradox of the local appears in a region of the cultural industries so globally huge and yet so marginal in cultural policy research – contemporary art. While it is obvious that terms of value routinely ascribed to the creative economy (expression, imagination, ideas, the creative process) have their origins in the philosophical-historical emergence of Western art, they so presuppose a subjectivity already colonized by western economy and its concepts of individual identity, private property and rights. In turn this makes for categorical distinctions between arts, design, craft, fashion, all of whose production presupposes a radical separation from local “communal” norms and the collective bases of shared resources. So necessary to policy formulations of creative economy (UNESCO’s, 2009 Framework for Cultural Statistics – one of the better formulations), the way creative economy is defined does represent a society wholly committed to commodifying its own life world. To the extent that this was always the price of industrialization, what about democracy? The creative economy can surely be a Trojan horse for elitism and celebrity, opportunism and self-interest, and the monopolism and oligopolies that dominate cultural production in the West. What are the implications for the local and the communal with regard the imposition of the rigorous Intellectual Property regime proposed in this report? Gender and women’s empowerment does not play much of a role in this report, nor the potential for community leaders (over, say, commercially minded entrepreneurs), or recognition for resistance movements and the self-managed cultural policies of alternative communities. Nonetheless – we can’t have it all. This report is a huge achievement, and a new platform for much needed conceptual thinking on the relation between cultural policies, strategies for cultural production, and globally significant issues for development.

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